

## REVOLUTION IN ITALY

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In our first article on *The Concordats*, after having painted the state of servitude to which the princes had reduced the Church, we announced that the day of her deliverance was at hand. We invited our brothers of France to the spectacle of the Catholics of Ireland and of Belgium, again asking for their freedom of conscience as a national freedom. We discoursed with them about Poland, wherein the faith mingled its banners with the white eagle, the religious with soldiers, the bishops with nobles, where everyone marched together in favor of God and of the country as a whole against schism and plundering. Another country was identified in our wishes: Italy. Indeed it is impossible for Christians to forget it when considering the designs of Providence on the world. There, also, insurrections recently erupted in Modena, in Parma, in the legations, and brought to our new Pontiff, along with weighty concerns, striking proof that the cheers that greeted his accession to the Holy See arose from the love of the Romans and not from the passing enthusiasm of a holiday.

Yes, Italy is thoughtful and suffering as we were saying, but of an affliction that ought not be confused with the one that Ireland, Belgium, and Poland combat at this moment by various efforts, according to their good fortune, but whose heroism, equally appropriate, equally upright, leaves no doubt concerning the understanding owed them. The cause of these three nations would not need justification any longer than that the yoke of

the stranger, the bondage of conscience and of religion, the conspiracy of a single person against the intellectual advancement of the human race become permanent matters, placed under eternal protection by Him Who said to men: *Render to God what belongs to God*. Try as we might, we will never be able to make injustice sacred. Vanquished men will always have the right to revive the victory as long as they can; it will never be adequate to take away their country forever then to give it back to them as exile. The land of a nation is stipulated by a possession longer than that of a single man; a battle does not slay justice in one stroke, a treaty does not restore it in one day, at the whim of the victor. What it was before, it remains after, assured of finding weapons against the scraps of paper signed with the point of a sword by two or three princes. When not only the ground, the laws, the interests, and honor are victims of power, but that conscience and religion also fall under the yoke, then justice comes from heaven more than from weapons, and the people themselves, destined to die in defending their freedom, leave to the world, as the penultimate pages of their history, the Book of Maccabees.

How fortunate for Italy if its faith did not have to fear the oppression of those who wish, so they say, to deliver her from the foreigner! We love freedom because of itself; but we cannot conceive of freedom absent freedom of conscience, and we will never be able to recognize as its friends those who dream of other ruins than the destruction of unjust laws. Freedom is indivisible, the history of our troubles stands as proof. If for forty years we were the plaything of despotism; if so many generous souls, when on the scaffold, lost hope for everything they had loved all their lives, and said of freedom, as they gazed on the people, what André Chenier<sup>1</sup> said of his genius, as he struck his forehead: “And yet, there was something there!” — it is that, from the very start, we misunderstood that freedom is a common good, the undying heritage of all the children of Adam, and that it died on the day when a citizen called on it but received no reply, on the day when God called for it, in vain, from the height of a cross. We have experienced this cruelly enough that we shudder to see it inflicted on other nations. We cannot deceive ourselves that Italy would have been

menaced if Providence had delivered it into the hands of the old liberalism fermenting in its bosom. Our new ideas have not yet penetrated the resistance where one dreams of its liberty, where one blasphemes it while menacing Christ, that innocent head charged to the end with iniquities that it did not commit. Nowhere more than in Italy and Spain does the terrible prejudice reign that the Catholic religion is hostile to freedom, and nowhere do those who cherish this prejudice, only half conquered among us, have a stronger temptation to maintain it and take vengeance. Indeed, the Catholic Church is still rich there, and when one wishes to bring freedom in a country, while disdaining the things revered by the country, some gold is needed to bribe the victory. Every time the Procida<sup>2</sup> of Italy pass before our churches and our convents they must say to themselves, while placing their hand on their chest: half of that would do very well.

They deceive themselves. This is how Spain slipped from them and how they fell back on the day when the necessary reforms would revive that nation which enjoys the benefits of a deep faith, but which no longer remembers that the wanderer has aspirations for the earth as for eternity, and that vessels leaving its ports once discovered two worlds. A fawning transplantation there of the eighteenth century, a parody of our ideas, more irreligious than liberal, made them dislike their reformers. Continuing to sleep under their sun, they barely heard the cry of France that Mina<sup>3</sup> kept shouting to them, even though it was from the heights of the Pyrenees, while promising that freedom would respect their faith. In the interior of Germany, the same cause delayed the progress of genuine liberalism; the Catholics trembled under the hands of princes, fearful of oppression from freedom, preferring anew the yoke of lead to the yoke of the ax. Indeed, who would opt to buy a charter at the price that it cost us, and who is the man, however strong he may be, who, weighing in advance the freedom that we have, and the forty years that preceded it, would dare to touch one of the options presented and say to God: So be it! Only God is capable of such resolutions: to make them requires plunging very deeply into the mysteries of the centuries, the same thought that on Calvary sacrificed for the love of men the first-born of

eternity. Not one of us has the right to consent to so great an immolation and to grant to nations the fulfillment of their dreams by means of blood. As long as those who conspire for the freedom of Spain and of Italy judge the Catholic faith as their principal obstacle, the belongings of Catholics as their first goal, we will be unable to applaud their efforts. We will recognize what is fair in their complaints, what is sacred in the hopes of nations; but we will also remember that is the task of the most untainted souls to place the foundations of freedom in a country. We will remember Penn<sup>4</sup> reaching the shores of America who, from its inhabitants, bought forests destined to bear his name, earning by this act of justice to become one of the ancestors of American freedom. We will have in mind those who wrested from Austria a few valleys of the Alps, in the fourteenth century, and who placed every one of their victories under the protection of a humble chapel, men irreproachable in faith as well as in freedom. We will relate that Belgium took more than four months to achieve its deliverance, that France took forty years for its own with so much effort and so many as yet unending tribulations.

True, Italy continues to suffer. Several states have lost their ancient nationality through the same injustice that had attached Belgium to Holland; this recent outrage gave new life to the aversion that Italy always had for foreigners. It linked the present to history through hate. Moreover, the regime that the authorities of 1815 had established in Europe stretched out over the conquests of Italy and ended up making insupportable to the natives a yoke whose injustice would not have been forgiven a better government. Other states, whose territory had been respected, were conscious of the oppressive ideas in which the victorious powers had placed their safety. Intellectual freedom disappeared from Italy, from that land where it had so often received a very warm reception. While the literature of the nineteenth century began to prevail everywhere, classical letters faded away in the country of their rebirth. There, writers were pestered like the dregs of society; poetry itself, condemned to the galleys, called for vengeance from all those whom injuries had not yet moved. A universal need for deliverance awakened in the fetters wherein governments had

thought to have chained what God Himself had left free: man's ability to think. Already, at a distance from the foreigner, Naples realized that its sighs had been heard; the promises of its new sovereign gave it some hope whose fulfillment would be less of a major act of justice than one of delayed entitlement.

As for the Roman states, no other government spared its subjects from more afflictions than it did. They have a place apart in the last fifteen years of Italy. This administration of justice by the three pontiffs who succeeded each other before Gregory XVI cannot be gainsaid by anyone; their conduct was worthy of the difficult days they lived in. It did not occur to them to lift the Apostolic See to the level of their thoughts. Reforms more appropriate to their times could have been made; these occupied the minds of Leo XII and of Pius VIII during their entire pontificates. But the people were not the only ones to lose freedom; all of Europe was aware of the worries that disturbed Pius VIII on his deathbed. His successor, elected on the eve of the insurrections in Italy, had already received in the universal cheers proof that his choice did not withhold the help promised to the see he occupied. Moreover, other testimonials revealed to him that the great majority of his people was not unmindful of the gentleness of the Roman government, of all governments, the one least noticed by those governed. Gregory XVI continued the work of his predecessors; his every word revealed that he had understood the needs of the world. Undoubtedly, he would fulfill the hopes that arose in all parts of Europe better than those who had already desecrated convents in the name of freedom for Italy.

We have no fear for Rome. Because of it, we would hope for the deliverance of the Peninsula, as if we did not wish the same for people whose rights have been wounded, whose future has already been ruined. Rome has seen the enemy at its doors too often to fear anything. No authority in Europe had a possession longer than hers, acquired more peacefully; if the rights of the people do not defend her, God will send some wretch to the Capitol to place a rope around the necks of these new Rienzis<sup>5</sup>, who in their plots overlook

only God and freedom. May Italy, one day, find a liberator worthy of itself, and not acquire, as we did, an incomplete deliverance for forty years of troubles! May the nineteenth century be worthy of the conquest of Spain and of Italy, and plant on the cupola of St. Peter the spotless flag of generations not yet born!!!

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**ENDNOTES** - [Trans.]

1. André Chenier (1762-1794); French poet, disillusioned by the Revolution. Died on the scaffold.
2. Followers of Baron Joseph de Procida (ca 1225-after 1302); Neapolitan; conspired against Charles of Anjou; instigator of the Sicilian Vespers.
3. Mina: Don Francisco Espoz y Mina, chief of Spanish rebels against Napoleon.
4. William Penn, 1644-1718 ; English Quaker, founder of Pennsylvania.
5. Rienzi (Rienzo): Nicolas Gabrino, aka Cola di Rienzo; 1313-1354. Italian populist figure; dreamed of restoring Rome to its ancient grandeur, and fought to suppress the temporal power of the Pope.

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